

Department I - C Plus Plus

# Modern and Lucid C++ for Professional Programmers

Week 11 – Heap Memory Management

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HS2023



**OST**

Ostschweizer  
Fachhochschule

- **You can safely use heap allocation**
- **You can write leak-free recursive data structures**
- **You can explain the difference between the two main smart-pointers found in the STL**

- **Recap Week 10**
- **Heap Memory Management**
  - Introduction / Motivation
  - Dangers of Raw Pointers
  - Managing Unique Objects
  - Sharing Objects
  - Recursive Data Structures

## Recap Week 10



- **Define class templates completely in header files**
- **Member functions of class templates**
  - Either in class template directly
  - Or as inline function templates in the same header file
- **static member variables of a template class can be defined in header without violating ODR, even if included in several compilation units**
  - Since C++17 they can even be declared inside the class template, this requires the `inline` keyword

```
template <typename T>
struct staticmember {
    inline static int dummy{sizeof(T)};
};
```

```
using size_type = typename SackType::size_type;
```

- **Within the template definition you might use names that are directly or indirectly depending on the template parameter**
  - E.g. everything using `SackType::`
- **But you have to tell the compiler if one is a type**
  - In contrast to a variable or function name
- **When the `typename` keyword is required you should extract the type into a type alias**
- **Old spelling in `typedef`**

```
typedef typename SackType::size_type size_type;
```

- Rule: Always use `this->` or the class name `::` to refer to inherited members in a template class

```
this->bar
```

```
gotchas::bar
```

- If the name could be a dependent name the compiler will not look for it when compiling the template definition
- Checks might only be made for dependent names at template usage (=template instantiation)
  - That is sometimes the reason for lengthy error messages from template usages

- **How can we adapt a standard container by adding invariants or by extending their functionality?**
  - SafeVector -> no undetected out-of-bounds access
  - IndexableSet -> provide operator[]
  - SortedVector -> guarantee sorted order of elements
- **Template class inheriting from template base class**
  - And inherit ctors of standard container
  - Caution: no safe conversion to base class, no polymorphism

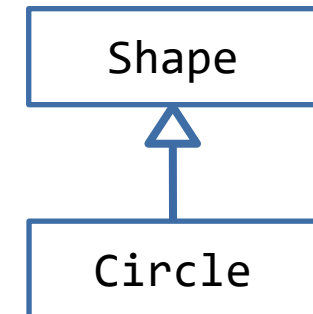
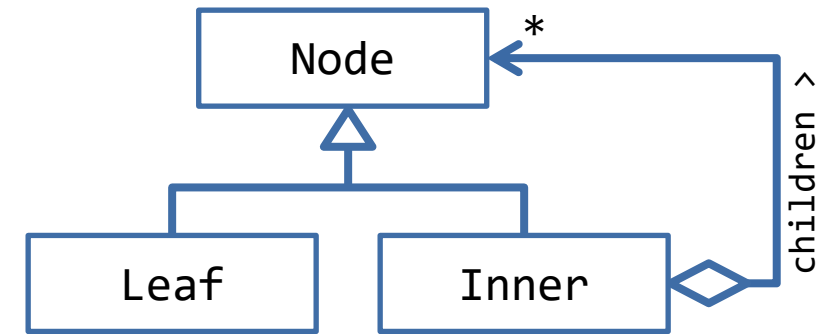


# Heap Memory Management



- **Stack memory is scarce**
- **It might be needed for creating object structures**
  - First think about library classes for your intended structure
  - Look into the Boost library collection if the STL is insufficient
- **For polymorphic factory functions to class hierarchies**
  - If you return a base-class "pointer" to one of its subclasses from functions

```
std::unique_ptr<Shape> circle = make_circle(x, y, r);
```



- **Always rely on library classes for managing it (if possible)**
- **Resource Acquisition Is Initialization (RAII) Idiom**
  - Allocation in the constructor
  - Deallocation in the destructor
  - Use RAII wrapper as value in local scope
  - Destructor will be called when the scoped is exited (}, return or exception)

```
struct RaiiWrapper {  
    RaiiWrapper() {  
        //Allocate Resource  
    }  
    ~RaiiWrapper() {  
        //Deallocate Resource  
    }  
};
```

- [illegible]

- **C++ allows allocating objects on the heap directly**

```
auto ptr = new int{};
std::cout << *ptr << '\n';
delete ptr;
```

- However, if done manually you are responsible for deallocation and risk undefined behavior!

- Memory leaks
- Dangling pointers
- Double deletes

- **No garbage collection happens, it is your responsibility**

```
auto factory(int i) -> std::unique_ptr<X> {  
    return std::make_unique<X>(i);  
}
```

- **std::unique\_ptr<T> obtained with std::make\_unique<T>()**
- **std::shared\_ptr<T> obtained with std::make\_shared<T>()**
- **std::make\_unique<T>() and std::make\_shared<T>() are factory functions**
- **With these smart pointers you don't have to call delete ptr; yourself**
- **Still: Always prefer storing a value locally as value-type variable (stack-based or member)**

- **Used for unshared heap memory**
  - Or for local stuff that must be on the heap  
(rarely needed, e.g. for large instances and limited stack space)
  - Can be returned from a factory function
- **Only a single owner exists**
- **It can wrap to-be-freed pointers from C functions when interfacing legacy code**
- **Not best for class hierarchies**
  - Use `std::shared_ptr<Base>` instead (`unique_ptr` base classes need virtual destructor)

- A std::unique\_ptr cannot be copied

```
#include <iostream>
#include <memory>
#include <utility>
```

```
auto create(int i) -> std::unique_ptr<int> {
    return std::make_unique<int>(i);
}
```

Transfer of ownership  
through return by value

```
auto main() -> int {
    std::cout << std::boolalpha;
    auto pi = create(42);
    std::cout << "*pi = " << *pi << '\n';
    std::cout << "pi.valid? " << static_cast<bool>(pi) << '\n';
    auto pj = std::move(pi);
    std::cout << "*pj = " << *pj << '\n';
    std::cout << "pi.valid? " << static_cast<bool>(pi) << '\n';
}
```

Explicit transfer of  
ownership from lvalue

- Some C functions return pointers that must be deallocated with the function `free(ptr)`
- We can use `std::unique_ptr` to ensure that
- Example: `__cxa_demangle()` is such a function

```
auto demangle(std::string const & name) -> std::string {  
    auto cleanup = [] (char * ptr){  
        free(ptr);  
    };  
    std::unique_ptr<char, decltype(cleanup)> toBeFreed {  
        __cxxabiv1::__cxa_demangle(name.c_str(), 0, 0, 0), cleanup};  
    std::string result(toBeFreed.get());  
    return result;  
}
```

- If there is an exception in the context of that pointer, `free` will be called on the returned pointer
  - No memory leak



- A std::unique\_ptr storing the address of the deleter function/lambda has an extra pointer and thus is twice the size
  - Better provide a deleter type as template argument, which implies no space overhead

```
struct free_deleter {  
    template<typename T>  
    auto operator()(T * p) const -> void {  
        free(const_cast<std::remove_const_t<T> *>(p));  
    }  
};  
  
template<typename T>  
using unique_C_ptr = std::unique_ptr<T, free_deleter>;  
  
auto plain_demangle(char const * name) -> std::string {  
    unique_C_ptr<char> toBeFreed{__cxxabiv1::__cxa_demangle(name, 0, 0, 0)};  
    std::string result(toBeFreed.get());  
    return result;  
}
```

- **As member variable:**

- To keep a polymorphic reference instantiated by the class or passed in as `std::unique_ptr` and transferring ownership

- **As local variable:**

- To implement RAII
- Can provide custom deleter function as second template argument to type that is called on destruction

- **`std::unique_ptr<T> const p{new T{}}; // local`**

- Cannot transfer ownership
- Cannot leak!
- But better use `std::make_unique<T>!`

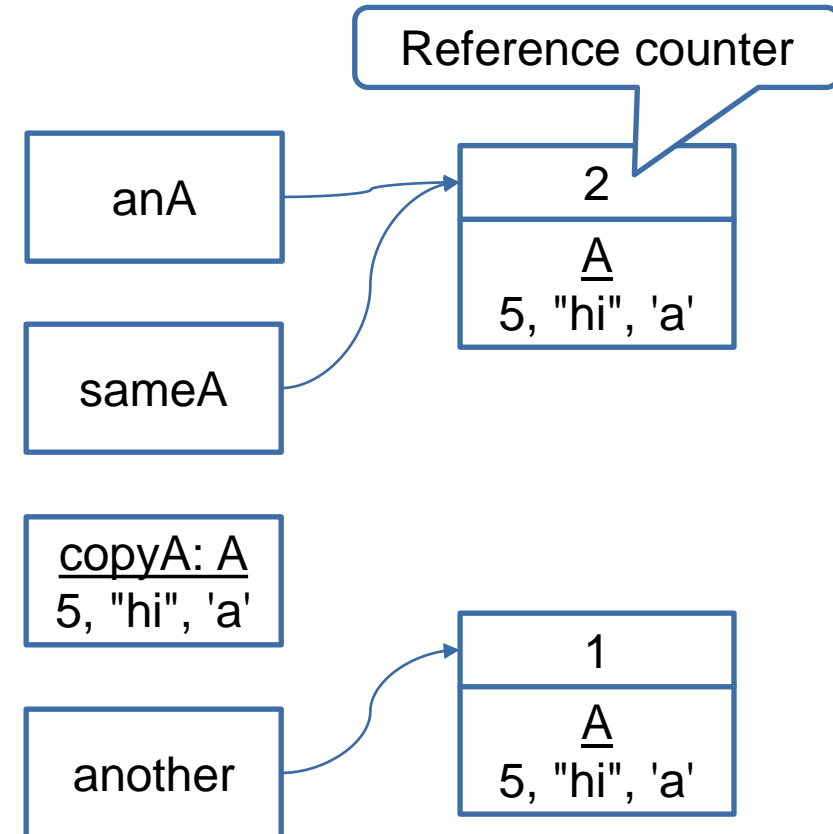
- **std::unique\_ptr** allows only one owner and cannot be copied, but only returned by value
- **std::shared\_ptr** works more like Java's references
  - It can be copied and passed around
  - The last one ceasing to exist deletes the object
- You create **std::shared\_ptr** and associated objects of type **T** using **std::make\_shared<T>(...)**
- **std::make\_shared<T>** allows all **T**'s public constructor's parameters to be used

```
struct Article {  
    Article(std::string title, std::string content);  
    //...  
};  
  
Article cppExam{"How to pass CPl?", "In order to pass the C++ exam, you have to..."};  
  
std::shared_ptr<Article> abcPtr = std::make_shared<Article>("Alphabet", "ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ");
```

- If you really need heap-allocated objects, because you create your own object networks you can use `std::shared_ptr<T>`
- If you need to support run-time polymorphic container contents or class members that can not be passed as reference, e.g., because of lifetime issues
- Factory functions returning `std::shared_ptr` for heap allocated objects
- But first check if alternatives are viable:
  - (const) references as parameter types or class members (to surviving objects!)
  - Plain member objects or containers with plain class instances

- If you really need to keep something explicitly on the heap, use a factory

```
struct A {  
    A(int a, std::string b, char c);  
};  
  
auto createA() -> std::shared_ptr<A> {  
    return std::make_shared<A>(5, "hi", 'a');  
}  
  
auto main() -> int {  
    auto anA = createA();  
    auto sameA = anA; //second pointer to same object  
    A copyA{*sameA}; //copy ctor.  
    auto another = std::make_shared<A>(copyA); //copy ctor on heap  
}
```



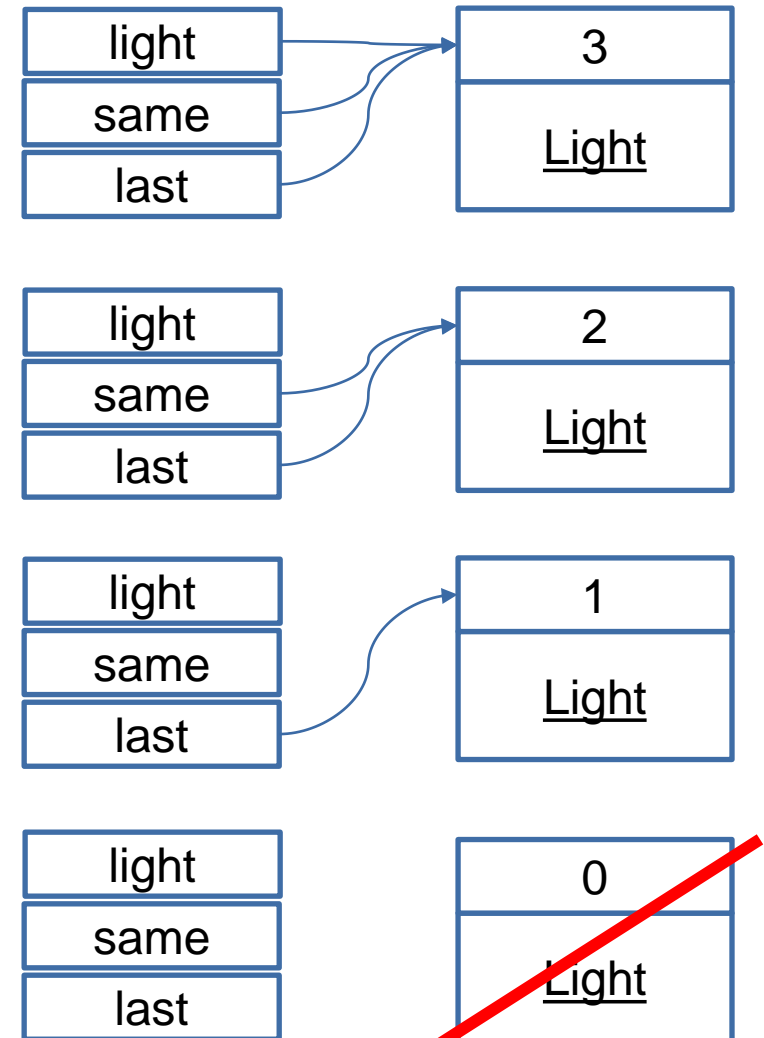
- **Use `std::ostream`, just as an example for a base class**

- And a very primitive factory function.
- The concrete type is required as template argument for `make_shared`

```
auto os_factory(bool file) -> std::shared_ptr<std::ostream> {  
    using namespace std;  
    if (file) {  
        return make_shared<ofstream>("hello.txt");  
    } else {  
        return make_shared<ostringstream>();  
    }  
}  
  
auto main() -> int {  
    auto out = os_factory(false);  
    if (out) {  
        (*out) << "hello world\n";  
    }  
    auto fileout = os_factory(true);  
    if (fileout) {  
        (*fileout) << "Hello, world!\n";  
    }  
}
```

- Last `std::shared_ptr` handle destroyed/reset will delete the allocated object

```
struct Light {  
    Light() {  
        std::cout << "Turn on\n";  
    }  
    ~Light() {  
        std::cout << "Turn off\n";  
    }  
};  
  
auto main() -> int {  
    auto light = std::make_shared<Light>();  
    auto same = light;  
    auto last = same;  
    light.reset();  
    same.reset();  
    last.reset();  
}
```

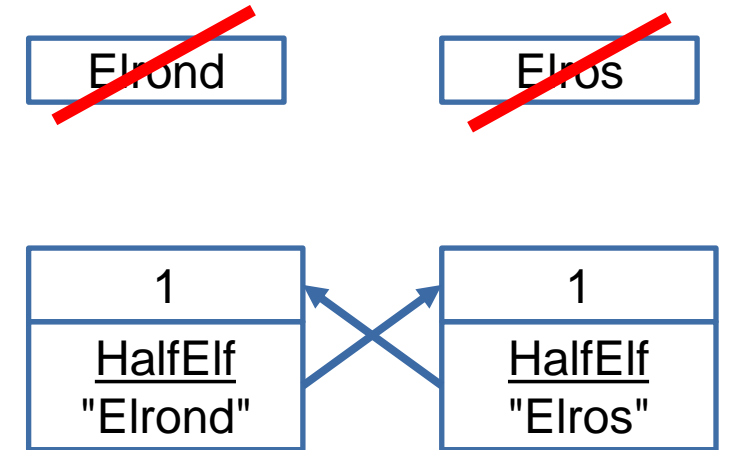


- Last std::shared\_ptr handle destroyed will delete allocated object

```
using HalfElfPtr = std::shared_ptr<struct HalfElf>;

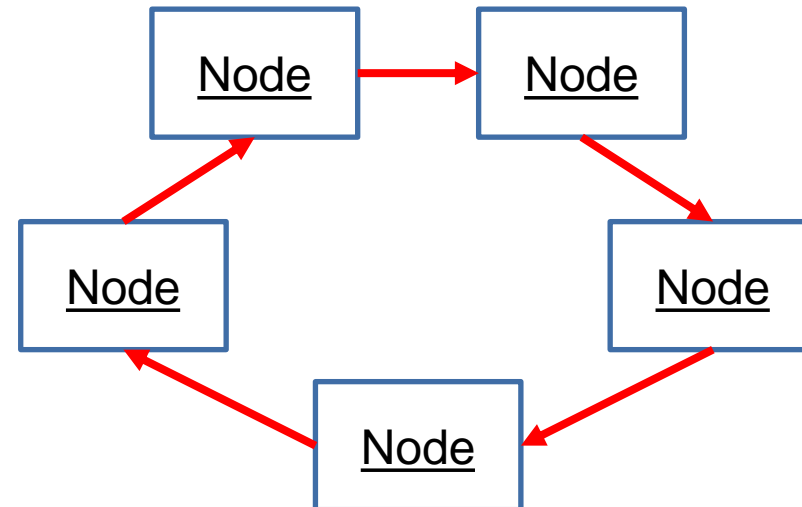
struct HalfElf {
    explicit HalfElf(std::string name) : name{name}{}
    std::string name{};
    std::vector<HalfElfPtr> siblings{};
};

void middleEarth() {
    auto elrond = std::make_shared<HalfElf>("Elrond");
    auto elros = std::make_shared<HalfElf>("Elros");
    elrond->siblings.push_back(elros);
    elros->siblings.push_back(elrond);
}
```





- Last `std::shared_ptr` handle destroyed will delete allocated object
- If instances of a class hierarchy are always represented by a `std::shared_ptr<base>` but created through `std::make_shared<concrete>()` the destructor no longer needs to be virtual
  - `std::shared_ptr` memorizes concrete destructor for deletion on construction time in `std::make_shared<concrete>`
- `std::shared_ptr` can lead to object cycles no longer cleared, because of circular dependency
  - `std::weak_ptr` breaks such cycles

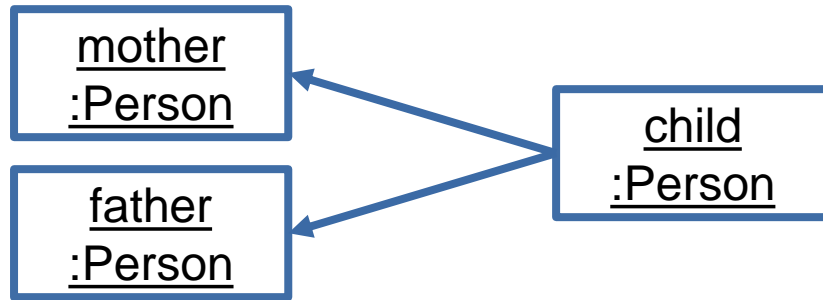


## Example: Parents and Children

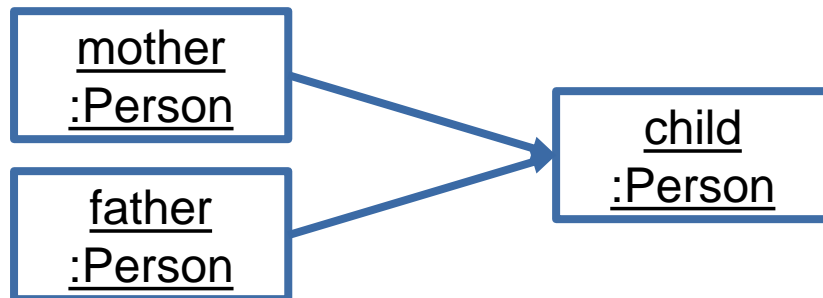
Creating cycles with `std::shared_ptr`  
Breaking cycles with `std::weak_ptr`  
Acquiring `std::shared_ptr` to this with `std::enable_shared_from_this`

- Create a class **Person** that represents a person

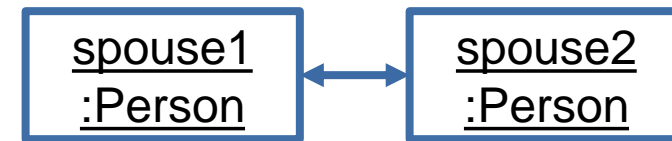
- Each Person knows about its parents (father/mother) if they are still alive



- Each Person knows about its children



- Each Person can be married

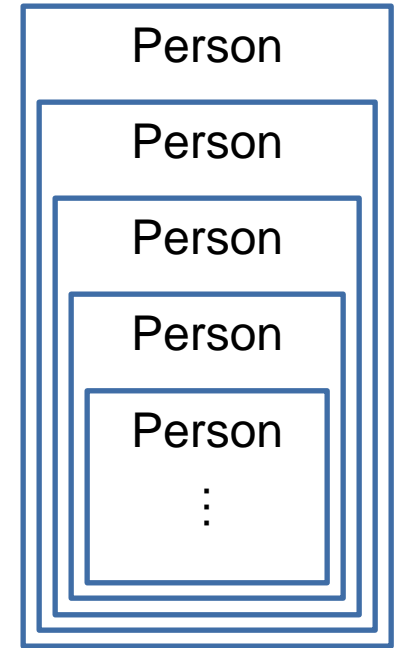


- This results in cycles between spouses and between parents and children!

- **Observation: You cannot use direct members (Persons as value members)**

- This would incur copying Persons
- The Person class would be recursive and therefore infinite

```
struct Matryoshka {  
    Matryoshka nested;  
};
```



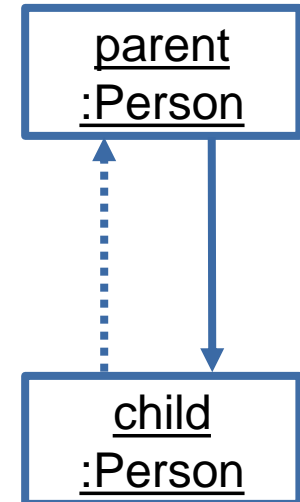
- **We need an indirection (Smart Pointer)**

```
struct Matryoshka {  
    std::shared_ptr<Matryoshka> nested;  
};
```

- The `std::shared_ptr` cycles need to be broken
- `std::weak_ptr` does not allow direct access to the object
  - With `lock()` a `std::shared_ptr` to the object can be acquired

```
struct Person {  
    std::shared_ptr<Person> child;  
    std::weak_ptr<Person> parent;  
};
```

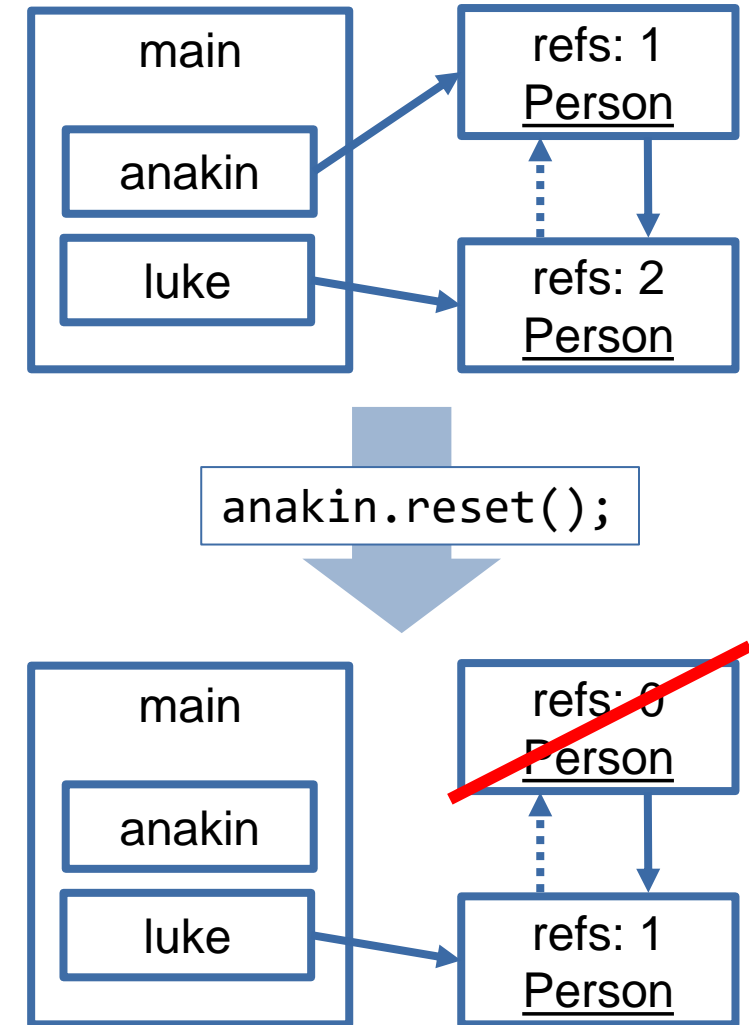
—————> shared\_ptr  
.....> weak\_ptr



- The `std::shared_ptr` cycles need to be broken

```
struct Person {
    std::shared_ptr<Person> child;
    std::weak_ptr<Person> parent;
};

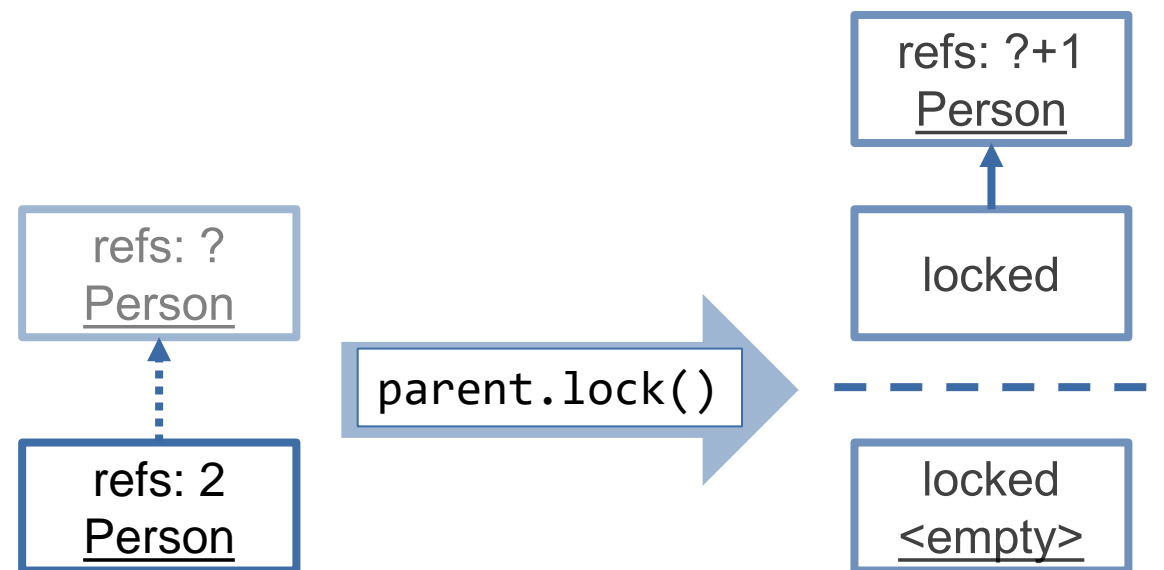
auto main() -> int {
    auto anakin = std::make_shared<Person>();
    auto luke = std::make_shared<Person>();
    anakin->child = luke;
    luke->parent = anakin;
    //...
}
```



- A std::weak\_ptr does not know whether the pointee is still alive

- std::weak\_ptr::lock() returns a std::shared\_ptr that either points to the alive pointee or is empty

```
struct Person {  
    std::shared_ptr<Person> child;  
    std::weak_ptr<Person> parent;  
  
    auto Person::acquireMoney() const -> void {  
        auto locked = parent.lock();  
        if (locked) {  
            begForMoney(*locked);  
        } else {  
            goToTheBank();  
        }  
    }  
};
```



- It would be nice if parents could spawn their own children

- We need a `std::weak_ptr/std::shared_ptr<Person>` to the `this` object, to assign `child.parent`

```
struct Person {
    std::shared_ptr<Person> child;
    std::weak_ptr<Person> parent;

    auto spawn() -> std::shared_ptr<Person> {
        child = std::make_shared<Person>();
        child->parent = ???;
        return child;
    }
};
```

```
struct Person : std::enable_shared_from_this<Person> {
    std::shared_ptr<Person> child;
    std::weak_ptr<Person> parent;

    auto spawn() -> std::shared_ptr<Person> {
        child = std::make_shared<Person>();
        child->parent = weak_from_this();
        return child;
    }
};
```

Curiously Recurring  
Template Pattern (CRTP)

- Publicly deriving from `std::enable_shared_from_this<T>` provides the member functions `weak_from_this()` and `shared_from_this()`

- It internally stores a `std::weak_ptr` to the `this` object

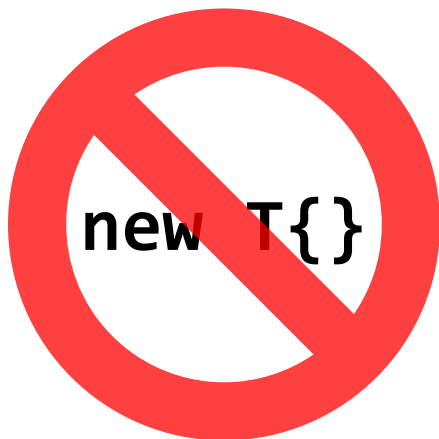


- Smart pointers can be stored in standard containers, like `std::vector`s
- An alias for a `Person` pointer that can be used in the type itself requires a forward declaration

```
using PersonPtr = std::shared_ptr<struct Person>;

struct Person {
    //...
private:
    std::vector<PersonPtr> children;
    std::weak_ptr<Person> mother;
    std::weak_ptr<Person> father;
};
```

- Prefer `std::unique_ptr`/`std::shared_ptr` for heap-allocated objects over `T *`
- Use `std::vector` and `std::string` instead of heap-allocated arrays
- Avoid circular object dependencies when creating object structures with `std::shared_ptr`
  - This requires deliberate breaking of cycles using `std::weak_ptr` to get rid of the instantiated objects
- Copying/destroying `std::shared_ptr` is slow due to atomic counter



Use `nullptr`